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# India's Experience In Developmental Planning

by

Kanwal Kumar

Since the end of World War II a remarkable change has come about in the world. Many countries which had been under the yoke of imperialism have regained their freedom. A new awakening has come that poverty, ignorance, and disease are not inevitable and can be wiped away by purposeful efforts. The accumulated store of knowledge and techniques and the continuing advance in science and technology provide the basis for a rapid transformation of the material conditions. The valuable experience of many countries in evolving political and economic organizations required to deal with such problems and an atmosphere of international cooperation have made the task easier. With greater awareness of the possibilities of desirable change and realization of the vast and growing gulf separating the living standards of the people of the developed countries from that of the developing countries, there is increasing popular demand and pressure for rapid economic development in the poor countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

In Asia, for instance, the emergence of India as a free, democratic country in 1947 was a significant event in many ways. It struck the death knell of colonialism and one after another new nations emerged, freed from colonial bondage. Political freedom had been considered as a necessary condition in India for launching on a course of rapid transformation of an under-developed, feudal socio-economic order into a dynamic, progressive society. Soon after independence was achieved, India decided to deal with this vast and complex task boldly, in a planned manner, within the framework of its democratic institutions. The aim was nothing less than a peaceful revolution brought about with maximum consensus of people.<sup>1</sup> This was an undertaking for which there was no clear precedent. It was a bold experiment, sustained by faith in rationality and trust in democracy.

The argument is sometimes heard that centralized planning is inconsistent with individual freedom and inimical to democracy. This may be true in specific cases. But in general there is inherently no basic antagonism between planning and freedom, properly interpreted.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, planning is for the enlargement of freedom rather than for its restrictions. There are impediments to the exercise of freedom by the individual and to the better functioning of the economy which planning seeks to overcome. There are restraints and sacrifices to be made, but these are, to be sure, meant only to remove greater constraints anticipated in the future. For the mass of the people freedom becomes meaningful only when there is better life and wider opportunities for fruitful endeavour, which is the central aim of planning for economic development.<sup>3</sup> Political democracy

is incomplete and indeed vulnerable, without democracy in the economic and social sphere.

In India, the formulation of the Plans is preceded by extensive discussions and consultations: there is a free and open discussion of the Plans by various interested groups, the people in general, and their elected representatives. This is a distinctive feature of the Indian Plans as compared to central planning in the Soviet Union. The performance of the Plans is open to close and constant scrutiny. Openness is a vital feature of Indian planning, and deliberately encouraged not only as a protection against misjudgment and abuse of power but as a means of exposing, and hence checking waste and inefficiency. Frequent criticism, widely publicized in the press may give an exaggerated impression of inadequacies, but on the whole the advantage of open discussion of faults and failures is regarded as being greater than the imagined benefits of suppression of information resorted to by some countries.

The First Five-Year Plan (1951-1956), was a modest effort in planning. It was largely a collation of public investment projects in the field of agriculture, irrigation, power and transport, which had been prepared earlier as part of the post-war reconstruction program. The growth of income aimed at over the plan period was only 10 per cent. The actual performance of the economy turned out to be far better. This created a feeling of confidence and popularized the concept of planning in the country.

Encouraged by the success of First Five-Year Plan, the Second Five-Year Plan, 1956-61, was a serious effort at a fuller articulation of the country's long-term objectives and strategy, and at formulating a comprehensive program for the whole economy, both in the public and private sectors. The programs were designed to yield an increase in national income of 25 per cent as the first phase of a long term goal of doubling aggregate income in 15 years and per capita income in a little over 20 years.

Though as a whole it was successful, the Second Plan did not meet all the targets: national income rose by about 20 per cent as against 25 per cent as planned. However, during this period, it became apparent that population was growing at a much faster rate than assumed earlier. The population growth rate was about 2.3 per cent compared to 1.25 per cent assumed earlier. Consequently, the overall rate of growth needed to fulfill the target of doubling per capita income in about 20 years had to be readjusted. Another important development of this period was the emergence of balance of payments difficulties. The need for external resources increased sharply with growing investments and industrial production. Exports could not be raised correspondingly. The foreign exchange gap had to be bridged with foreign aid. Towards the end of the Second Plan inflow of foreign capital from all sources amounted to about 2 dollars per capita of Indian population; although in absolute amount, India received the highest aggregate amount. Low per capita foreign assistance, nevertheless, acted as a catalytic agent in mobilizing additional internal resources.

These considerations weighed heavily in the formulation of the approach and in setting the targets for the Third Plan. There was a greater appreciation of the need and urgency of planned effort at developing indigenous production of metals, machinery, oil, and chemical fertilizers as a crucial element of a long term strategy for achieving a viable balance of payments and to reduce dependence on foreign resources.

Launched in 1961, the Third Five-Year Plan, 1961-66, has been one of considerable strain. Agricultural production remained virtually stagnant during 1961-62, 1962-63 and 1963-64. The general price level, which had remained fairly stable over several years, went up because of a spurt in food prices. Despite sizeable foreign aid for plan projects, the balance of payments difficulties continued, hampering production and construction of new projects. The armed aggression by China in October 1962 only worsened the already deteriorating situation. Progress was however maintained in industry, power, transport, education, and health.

Notwithstanding the many difficulties the picture is, however, one of all round progress. Though some of the important targets of the Third Plan will be realised only after a delay of one or two years, the achievements of the Third Plan are better than of the previous Plans.<sup>4</sup> More than the direct increase in incomes, the Third Plan has created the basis for a faster progress in the future by strengthening the base and capabilities of the country for increased capital formation.<sup>5</sup>

In short, despite set backs and hinderances, the progress achieved by India during the three Plan Period, 1950-51 to 1965-66, constitutes an impressive record for growth and development. An overall view of progress is presented in the table below.

Thus the overall index of agricultural production at the end of the Third Plan is about 60 per cent higher than 15 years ago. Industrial output, produced in modern factory establishments, has nearly trebled since 1951. What is more significant, this expansion has been accomplished by rapid diversification of the industrial base. India had hardly any machine building industry; the value of machine tools production was about Rs. 3.4 million (\$0.7 million) per year. Annual production of machine tools is now 90 times greater and it is expanding at the rate of 20 per cent per year. Capital equipment valued at nearly Rs. 6 billion (\$1.4 billion) is expected to be produced this year ranging from ball bearing and motors to boilers and heavy turbines and generators, transport equipment including railway locomotives, wagons and coaches and automobiles, ships and aeroplanes, industrial machinery for textile, metallurgical and mining equipment, instruments, etc. etc.

Industrial expansion in other fields is also notable. There has been rapid growth in the output of electricity and in the volume of transport activity.

Similarly, during this period, there has been remarkable improvement in public health and services and education facilities. Malaria

**Index Numbers of Agricultural and Industrial  
Production, India, 1950-51 — 1965-66**

	1950	1955	1960	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965	% over 1950
<b>AGRICULTURE</b> (Base 1950 = 100)									
Foodgrains	91	115	137	140	130	140	149	n.a.	
Non-foodgrains	105	120	152	154	152	156	175	n.a.	
<b>INDUSTRY</b> (Base 1956 = 100)									
General Index	74	92	130	138	151	163	175	185	+ 152
Mining & quarrying	87	97	137	147	162	176	169	183	+ 110
Manufacturing	73	92	128	136	147	159	170	180	+ 146
Petroleum products	6	78	148	157	169	197	217	226	+ 3423
Finished steel	81	94	164	209	279	315	319	330	+ 310
Machinery (except electrical machine)	45	83	237	269	291	365	411	469	+ 936
Chemicals	73	96	148	175	193	237	226	239	+ 228
Electricity	61	88	171	199	223	258	297	318	+ 422

Source: Government of India, *Economic Survey 1965-66*.

and small pox, which were widespread in India 15 years ago, have been practically wiped out. A network of primary health centres, which forms the base for providing integrated health services to the rural population, has been created. The average mortality rate has fallen from 25 per 1,000 in 1951 to 16 in 1966. Over the same period, average expectation of life at birth has risen from 35 years to 50 years.

Total enrolment in educational institutions rose from 24 million in 1951 to 68 million in 1966. The proportion of children between the ages of 6 and 11 years attending school has increased from about 43 per cent at the beginning of the First Plan to about 78 per cent in 1966. Enrolment in universities has increased from 0.32 million to 1.08 million during the same period. Facilities for professional and technical education have expanded even faster. The annual admission to medical colleges and to engineering institutions (degree and diploma) is now about 89,500 compared to 12,500 in 1951.

The significance of the achievements during this period has been that they have infused a new dynamism into the economy, and have created a capacity for accelerated growth. The steady rise in the rate of investment from about 5 per cent (in 1950-51) of national income has risen to approximately 13.5 per cent in 1965-66. The diversification of industrial base and in particular the rapid expansion of industries producing basic raw materials and capital goods have strengthened India's capacity for sustained development in the future.

While foreign aid has played and continues to play an important role in India's development, primarily as balance of payment support, India's own efforts at mobilizing resources have been significant. The rate of domestic savings has nearly doubled—from 5 per cent of national income in 1950-51 to over 10 per cent in 1965-66. During the last fifteen years, 80 per cent of total investment has been financed from internal savings. With economic diversification and rapid increases in investment the country is now poised for more rapid advance in the Fourth Plan which went into operation in April 1966.

Finally, it would be seriously unwise to assume that there are no unresolved problems. India today is very much alive to the problem of her population growth which, if uncontrolled, can cancel all gains of planning. The family planning program must be given top priority.

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